

IMMIGRATION AND STATE LAW



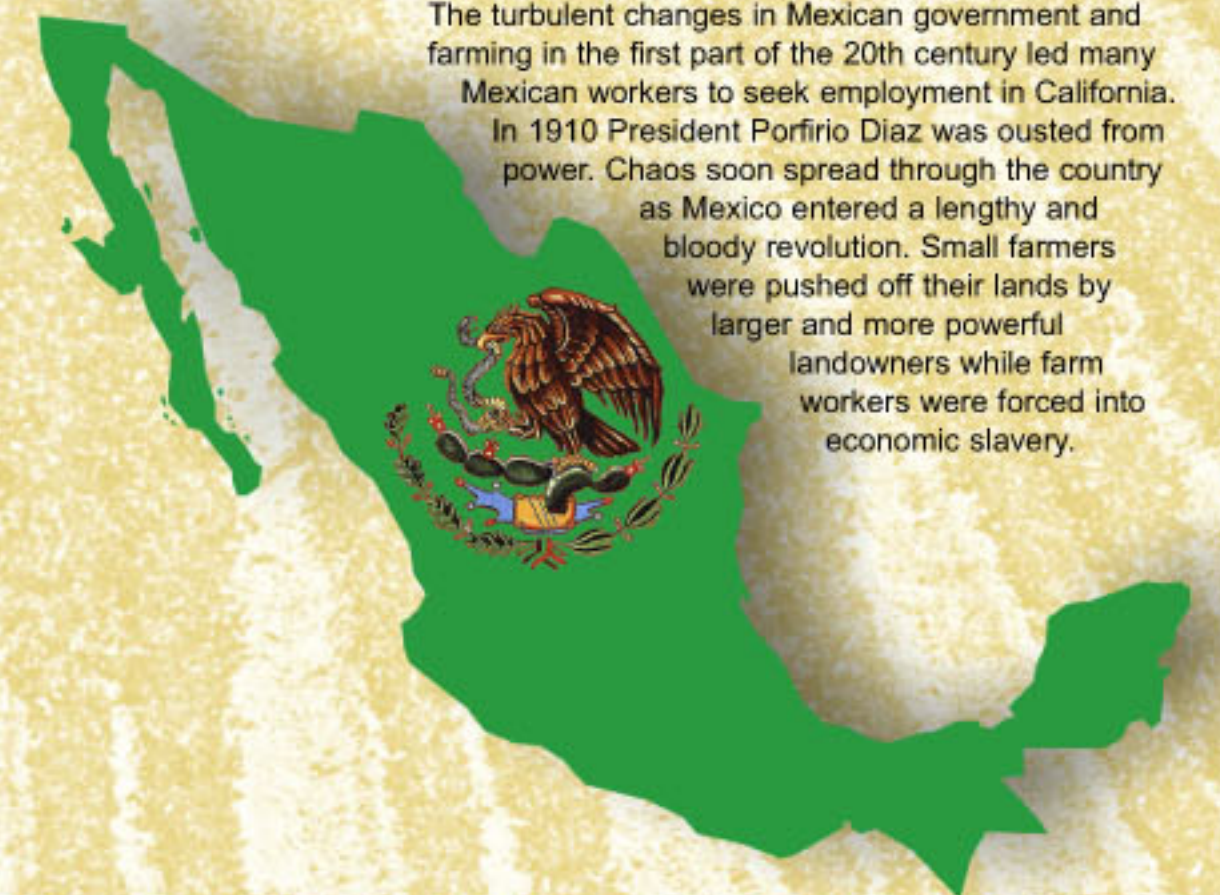
Punjabi districts c. 1900.
Source: Adapted from H. A. Rose, *Report on the Results of the Census of the Punjab, 1901* (Simla: Government of India, 1902).

Courtesy of: Making Ethnic Choices
California's Punjabi Mexican Americans
By Karen Isaksen Leonard

Punjab, a frontier area in the early 20th century, was situated on the northwest border of India. It was a flat, agricultural area supplied by 5 rivers that gave the region its name, pan jab. Population pressure, subdivision of land due to inheritance customs and the appeal of higher wages attracted many Punjabis, East Indians to California.



The development of the agricultural industry combined with restrictive immigration laws of the late 19th and early 20th century led to the integration of Mexican and Punjabi peoples in California. Large California farms specialized in seasonal crops and required a large labor force. From 1860 to 1910, California farmers experimented with a variety of labor sources including Native Americans, Chinese, Filipinos and Japanese. Several major recessions and the attraction of better wages in cities depleted these ethnic labor forces. Meanwhile, anti-foreign sentiments in the United States led to federal laws that dramatically restricted immigration from China and Japan. In 1913 California passed the Alien Land Act which prevented aliens ineligible for citizenship from owning land.



The turbulent changes in Mexican government and farming in the first part of the 20th century led many Mexican workers to seek employment in California. In 1910 President Porfirio Diaz was ousted from power. Chaos soon spread through the country as Mexico entered a lengthy and bloody revolution. Small farmers were pushed off their lands by larger and more powerful landowners while farm workers were forced into economic slavery.